

STATE OF ILLINOIS  
ILLINOIS COMMERCE COMMISSION

The Peoples Gas Light and Coke Company	)	
North Shore Gas Company	)	ICC Docket No. 14-0225
	)	ICC Docket No. 14-0224
Proposed General Increase	)	(consolidated)
In Rates For Gas Service	)	

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**DIRECT TESTIMONY OF**

**SARAH PICKETT**

Submitted on behalf of the People of the State of Illinois

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**July 2, 2014**

**AG EXHIBIT 5.0**

**EXHIBIT LIST**

AG Exhibit 5.1 .....	Photograph of gas meters in apartment vestibule
AG Exhibit 5.2 .....	Mandatory Safety Inspection notice from Peoples Gas to Sarah Pickett dated February 9, 2013
AG Exhibit 5.3 .....	Transcript of text messages among Sarah Pickett, Megan Bearry, and Shawnon Steinhort regarding Peoples Gas
AG Exhibit 5.4 .....	Notice of inside safety inspection from Peoples Gas dated June 4, 2013
AG Exhibit 5.5 .....	Final Notice of Disconnection from Peoples Gas to Sarah Pickett dated March 29, 2014
AG Exhibit 5.6 .....	Final Notice of Disconnection from Peoples Gas to Sarah Pickett dated April 11, 2014

1    **Q.     Please state your name and occupation.**

2    A.     My name is Sarah Pickett. I am the administrative assistant for the Center for the  
3            Advancement of Science Education at the Museum of Science and Industry.

4    **Q.     Where do you live?**

5    A.     In the basement apartment at 4851 N Rockwell, here in Chicago.

6    **Q.     Are there other residents in your building?**

7    A.     Yes. Megan Bearry lives on the first floor of our apartment building with her husband  
8            and Piper, her 2-year-old daughter. Shawnon Steinhort lives on the second floor with her  
9            husband and in May 2014 she gave birth to a baby boy, Gabriel. We've known each  
10           other for a few years now. They're good neighbors, and we look out for each other.

11   **Q.     Do you purchase gas from a utility?**

12   A.     Yes, I'm currently a customer of Peoples Gas.

13   **Q.     Have you had any interactions with Peoples Gas over the past year, apart from their**  
14           **regular billing?**

15   A.     Yes. In February of 2013 I received a notice from Peoples Gas requiring me to schedule  
16           a "mandatory safety inspection." On the day I received the notice, I set up an  
17           appointment with Peoples Gas for April 15, 2013. On April 15th, I took a day off work  
18           so I could let their worker into my apartment. When he arrived, he told me that he was  
19           actually "replacing" my meter. When he finished replacing my meter, he told me that the  
20           stove in my apartment was connected to Megan's meter rather than my own. The  
21           worker also told me that all three gas meters for my building, mine, Megan's, and  
22           Shawnon's, were on my floor, inside what he called my "vestibule."

23   **Q.     Turning your attention to the exhibit marked AG Exhibit 5.1, do you recognize this**

24 **exhibit?**

25 A. Yes. AG Exhibit 5.1 is a picture of my vestibule inside my apartment. All three meters  
26 for my building are shown inside, and this is where the Peoples Gas worker replaced and  
27 inspected the meters for my building.

28 **Q. Is this exhibit a true and accurate representation of your vestibule?**

29 A. Yes.

30 **Q. Has the photograph been altered in any way?**

31 A. No.

32 **Q. Now turning your attention to the exhibit marked AG Exhibit 5.2, do you recognize**  
33 **this exhibit?**

34 A. Yes. AG Exhibit 5.2 is a copy of the mandatory safety inspection notice I received in  
35 February. The notice is postmarked February 9, 2013. I noted the location of my  
36 vestibule and the date and time of my appointment with Peoples Gas on the lower right-  
37 hand corner of the notice after I confirmed my appointment on the day I received it. The  
38 notice also claims that they would inspect “any additional gas meters” in my building on  
39 the day of my appointment.

40 **Q. Is this exhibit a true and accurate copy of the inspection notice you received in**  
41 **February 2013 and the notes you made after confirming your appointment?**

42 A. Yes.

43 **Q. Has the inspection notice or your notes been altered in any way?**

44 A. No.

45 **Q. Turning your attention back to the visit from Peoples Gas on April 15th, did their**  
46 **worker perform any work on the additional gas meters in your vestibule?**

47 A. The worker informed me he was replacing my meter. He didn't do any work on Megan's  
48 or Shawnon's meter, as far as I know.

49 **Q. Did the fact that all three meters were located in your vestibule cause any problems**  
50 **later?**

51 A. Yes. Because all three meters were on my floor, I had to be present at or be aware of my  
52 neighbors' meter inspections. When Peoples Gas started sending red shut-off notices  
53 threatening to disconnect the gas service for the entire building, as I will discuss later in  
54 my testimony, we had to coordinate with each other to do all we could to keep us out of  
55 the cold.

56 **Q. How did you coordinate your efforts?**

57 A. We talked face-to-face and on the phone and sent texts. We all have busy lives, so texts  
58 were the best way to make sure we were apprised of developments as soon as possible.  
59 We were in this situation together. I couldn't be present every time a problem came up,  
60 but I knew Megan and Shawnon would keep me accurately updated. We relied on our  
61 conversations and texts and trusted each other to share only truthful information. It did  
62 not occur to us to do anything else.

63 **Q. Turning your attention to the exhibit marked AG Exhibit 5.3, do you recognize this**  
64 **exhibit?**

65 A. Yes. AG Exhibit 5.3 is a transcript of the text messages stored on my phone concerning  
66 the visits conducted by Peoples Gas. These messages were taken from my phone, typed,  
67 and compiled. The exhibit shows text message conversations between Megan, Shawnon,  
68 and me sent and received during March 2014 and April 2014. The exhibit also indicates  
69 the date on which each message was sent or received on my phone. There are three text

70 chains. The texts in the chain labeled “Group MMS Conversation” were sent and  
71 received by all three of us. We used this chain primarily to keep everyone apprised of  
72 new developments. This chain includes messages from the emergency visit on March  
73 13th, 2014 to Shawnon’s final inspection on April 18th. The chain labeled “MMS  
74 Conversation: Sarah Pickett and Megan Bearry” includes a conversation between Megan  
75 and me detailing the gas leak emergency. The texts span from March 12th to March  
76 13th. The chain labeled “MMS Conversation: Shawnon Steinhart and Sarah Pickett” is a  
77 conversation between Shawnon and me. The chain describes the scheduling of  
78 Shawnon’s first Peoples Gas visit on March 11th, the gas leak emergency, Shawnon’s  
79 struggle to schedule a second Peoples Gas visit, her final meter inspection on April 18th,  
80 and our thoughts on the conduct of Peoples Gas during this series of events.

81 **Q. Is this exhibit a true and accurate copy of the text messages stored on your phone?**

82 A. Yes.

83 **Q. Have these messages been altered in any way?**

84 A. No.

85 **Q. Turning your attention back to the meters in your vestibule, do you know whether**  
86 **Peoples Gas ever came back in order to replace the other two meters?**

87 A. Yes. On June 4, 2013, I took another day off work so Peoples Gas could work on  
88 Megan’s meter. I don’t remember if the worker replaced Megan’s meter or not, but he  
89 worked in my apartment for around forty-five minutes.

90 **Q. Turning your attention to the exhibit marked AG Exhibit 5.4, do you recognize this**  
91 **exhibit?**

92 A. Yes. AG Exhibit 5.4 is a copy of the notice the Peoples Gas worker left with us when he

finished his work on Megan's meter. The notice is dated June 4, 2013 and is addressed to my apartment building. The worker only checked off the box marked "I performed an inside safety inspection," rather than the box marked "I changed your meter."

**Q. Is this exhibit a true and accurate copy of the notice left by the Peoples Gas worker on June 4, 2013?**

A. Yes.

**Q. Has this notice been altered in any way?**

A. No.

**Q. Turning your attention back to the Peoples Gas worker's visit on June 4th, do you know whether the worker conducted any work on Shawnon's meter at that time?**

A. He only worked on Megan's meter. He didn't do any work on Shawnon's meter.

**Q. Do you know whether Peoples Gas ever came back in order to replace Shawnon's meter?**

A. Yes. On March 8, 2014 Shawnon told me by text that she had scheduled an appointment with Peoples Gas for the 11th. Because Shawnon had a spare key to my apartment, I gave her permission to let the Peoples Gas worker into my apartment. At least this time I didn't have to take a third day off from work.

**Q. Did you learn what work was done by Peoples Gas on March 11th, 2014?**

A. Yes. On March 11th, Shawnon informed me by text that the Peoples Gas worker had replaced her meter. I smelled gas when I came home later that evening, but it didn't overly concern me at first because a text from Shawnon said that the worker had mentioned I could expect to smell gas for a while, but it was safe.

**Q. Did the smell persist?**

116 A. Yes. On March 12th, the day after the installation, I received concerned texts from  
117 Megan and Shawnon talking about the gas smell. When I returned from work I noticed  
118 that the gas smell was still very present. We decided that we would call Peoples Gas the  
119 next day if the smell did not dissipate.

120 **Q. Why didn't you report the smell on March 12th?**

121 A. Shawnon told me by text that the worker who replaced her meter never informed her how  
122 long the smell would last. I did not know how long we were supposed to wait.

123 **Q. Did the smell dissipate by March 13th?**

124 A. No. I found it difficult to detect the smell of gas on the morning of March 13th after  
125 acclimating to the smell overnight, so I didn't call Peoples Gas immediately when I left  
126 for work. On the bus, I started reading the day's news. I saw a story about the gas main  
127 explosion in New York the day before. A moment later I received a worried text from  
128 Megan confirming the smell was still present. My alarm bells immediately went off. I  
129 called Peoples Gas to get an inspector to my building and frantically arranged for  
130 someone to let him into my apartment. A worker arrived at around 8 am, and Shawnon  
131 and my mother Anna Pickett let him inside.

132 **Q. Did you learn what the worker found?**

133 A. Yes. First I heard he blamed me for creating the gas leak by leaving the oven on. I was  
134 just getting over an awful cold at that point; I hadn't turned on the stove in weeks. Later  
135 that day I heard from Shawnon that the worker had discovered the problem: the pilot light  
136 in my oven had gone out. According to the worker, my oven hadn't been connected to  
137 Megan's meter, like the Peoples Gas worker from my April 2013 meter inspection had  
138 told me. Rather, he told me that my oven was connected to Shawnon's meter. I do not



139 know whether the irregularity with my oven was ever noted on Peoples Gas' records, but  
140 in any event, the worker replacing Shawnon's meter on March 11th failed to relight my  
141 pilot light. To this date I still don't know which meter my oven is connected to or  
142 whether Peoples Gas has recorded this irregularity on my account or any other account.

143 **Q. Did that emergency visit on March 13th finally settle the matter?**

144 A. No, and especially not for Shawnon. To our surprise, all three of us received another red  
145 shut-off notice dated March 29th, 2014.

146 **Q. Turning your attention to the exhibit marked AG Exhibit 5.5, do you recognize this**  
147 **exhibit?**

148 A. Yes. AG Exhibit 5.5 is a copy of the red shut-off notice I received dated March 29th.  
149 The notice claimed someone in our building "failed" to provide Peoples Gas access to  
150 perform a safety inspection. The notice threatened disconnection eight days after the  
151 date.

152 **Q. Is this exhibit a true and accurate copy of the shut-off notice you received**  
153 **postmarked March 29th, 2014?**

154 A. Yes.

155 **Q. Has this notice been altered in any way?**

156 A. No.

157 **Q. Did you learn why Peoples Gas sent this shut-off notice on March 29th?**

158 Yes. I learned from Shawnon that although the Peoples Gas worker had replaced  
159 Shawnon's meter on March 11th, he had been unable to transmit some information  
160 because his remote system had crashed. Shawnon called Peoples Gas after receiving the  
161 shut-off notice to check whether they had completed the inspection. Peoples Gas told her

162 that their system hadn't been updated to reflect the March 11th replacement or inspection,  
163 but assured her that she should be fine as long as she didn't receive any shut-off notices  
164 postmarked after March 26th. Because the notice was postmarked March 29th, Megan  
165 called Peoples Gas on April 2nd to clarify the situation and finally received a clear  
166 answer. Peoples Gas claimed that there was no record of a safety inspection performed  
167 on Shawnon's meter. They were going to shut off our building's gas in five days if she  
168 didn't schedule an inspection.

169 **Q. Was Shawnon able to schedule another appointment with Peoples Gas?**

170 A. Not immediately, although Shawnon made every effort to reach Peoples Gas on the  
171 phone. Shawnon spent April 3rd and 4th repeatedly calling Peoples Gas to schedule an  
172 inspection. Because of high call volume, she wasn't able to reach Peoples Gas until April  
173 4th, the day of her wedding. When Shawnon finally managed to talk to a live Peoples  
174 Gas representative, they told her they did not have any appointments available and she  
175 should try calling the following week. They told her they would note these scheduling  
176 difficulties in her file so they wouldn't try to shut off our service in the meantime, but  
177 that didn't stop them from hitting us with another red notice on April 14th.

178 **Q. Turning your attention to the exhibit marked AG Exhibit 5.6, do you recognize this**  
179 **exhibit?**

180 A. Yes. AG Exhibit 5.6 is a copy of the red shut-off notice I received on April 14th, dated  
181 April 11th. Like the last notice, it threatened disconnection in eight days after the date  
182 because someone in our building "failed" to provide Peoples Gas access for a safety  
183 inspection.

184 **Q. Is this exhibit a true and accurate copy of the shut-off notice you received on April**

185           **14th, 2014?**

186    A.     Yes.

187    **Q.     Has this notice been altered in any way?**

188    A.     No.

189    **Q.     After you received this shut-off notice on April 14th, did Shawnon manage to**  
190           **schedule an inspection?**

191    A.     Yes. On Monday, April 14th at around 7 pm, I heard from Shawnon that she had  
192           managed to schedule an appointment for April 18th after about forty minutes on the  
193           phone. On April 18th, a worker arrived at around 12:30 pm and conducted a safety  
194           inspection for Shawnon's new meter.

195    **Q.     How would you describe the effectiveness of Peoples Gas in conducting these meter**  
196           **inspections?**

197    A.     They lacked coordination and training. First, Peoples Gas provided inconsistent  
198           information on the work they were conducting. While their notices only mentioned  
199           safety inspections, their workers claimed they had to replace our meters. Second, all  
200           three of our meters were located in one closet. Rather than inspecting and replacing all  
201           three meters in one visit, Peoples Gas scheduled four separate visits for replacements or  
202           inspections and an additional emergency visit over the course of a year. Third, the first  
203           inspector had told me that my stove was connected to the first floor meter rather than my  
204           own, but their failure to communicate the connection issue within their company created  
205           an emergency situation due to a gas leak, putting all of us at risk. The worker who  
206           caused the leak discounted the seriousness of the problem by telling Shawnon that it was  
207           safe despite the smell, exacerbating the risk. Finally, Peoples Gas failed to record

Shawnon's meter replacement and inspection on March 11th because of the  
aforementioned remote system crash. As a result, we received multiple red shut-off  
notices forcing Shawnon to spend an inordinate amount of time and effort to schedule  
another visit. I don't believe we could be blamed for their equipment failures or their  
inability to manage call volumes, but we paid the price in inconvenience and worry.  
Although the Peoples Gas representative Shawnon finally reached on the phone told her  
they would note these difficulties on her file, we received yet another shut off notice just  
a week later.

**Q. How did their inefficiency affect you and your neighbors?**

A. The gas leak endangered the health and safety of everyone in our building, including  
Megan's daughter and Shawnon's unborn son. The multiple red shut-off notices we  
received were the worst part of the experience. The threat of disconnection strained our  
relationships. We couldn't afford to lose our gas service; Shawnon was eight months  
pregnant and Megan has a 2-year-old daughter. Megan especially became very  
frustrated with Shawnon because the threats stemmed from Shawnon's difficulty in  
scheduling an appointment with Peoples Gas. Ultimately however, Shawnon was not to  
blame and she endured the brunt of our experience. Because of Peoples Gas' technical  
glitches and high call volumes, Shawnon had to deal with the possibility of losing gas  
service for our entire building during the weeks before and after her wedding day while  
working full time and being eight months pregnant. The problems Shawnon encountered  
while trying to schedule appointments demonstrated a lack of effective personnel and  
working equipment at Peoples Gas. It's unacceptable that they continued to threaten their  
customers with disconnections because they could not keep their records straight.

231    **Q.**     **Does this conclude your testimony?**

232    **A.**     Yes.